

The other side of the pillow (2016)

was the other side of the moon
—unmapped, unexamined —place of promises
and answers, face known to Braille readers and
insomniac children,
articulated by sure fingers
and unacknowledged fears.

The other side of the pillow
was the sole refreshment in a nighttime
of desert walks and circular reasoning.

The flip side was sometimes better
than the “A” side, the coveted, unknowable face
worn but never seen.

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Now we know everything
about the undersides of ponds and planets,
hoard recipes in dream dishes
that can melt peoples away.

On the cool side of the pillow
we learn how the levers are wielded
and resisting bones broken.

Now we know the insides of bodies;
their systems and caches allow
for only so much tilt;
one life overturned
under a spotlight,
another under false flags.

Is it so much to ask (2017)

having a sandwich named after me

or a building, a tall, gleaming tower
or a bridge with a noble brow
and a half-dozen suicides?

Back to the sandwich. It could be introduced
to the public by a turtle wearing a top hat
and tails, and a cat with a clarinet
and licorice tail.

You know how I am
 fanciful but simple
in my tastes
yearning for what is original,
reaching for the grand.

If all the sandwiches and buildings and bridges
are taken, it could be a forest preserve.
Mountains rise, shadowed and misty
and the surrounding trees
stand thickly and territorial briars prickly.
Can you picture it?

But I'd rather have the sandwich – something
good with soup – seedless rye with a thin layer
of mixed mayonnaise and Dijon mustard, spread
all the way out to the crust, or maybe with pesto
but definitely with bacon and turkey

so that I'll have a reason
 and not an excuse
when I drift off
after our long conversation.



Alas, no sandwich, no monument
can compensate for everything
I leave undone — peace treaties and climate accords,
clothing the naked, housing the dispossessed;
the return of traditional American values — 60 cent a gallon
gasoline and cigarettes @ 50 cents a pack

can let the legless walk or the fearful run again,
reverse the course of rivers
or give the horseshoe crab time to evolve

and in this soured age
who is there to ask
to make it so?

Black Cat Bone (2017)

Big houses turn me on.
Under the table
in her denim skirt
 and dark tights
she owns a cat's slow,
silent moves
 and lips
that set my whistle
for a long ride
 on a whipsaw road.
In the great room
at The Breakers we take
stately breakfasts,
 lots of slippery surfaces
 and rubber-meets-the-road
at a canter. Sunlight strains through doors
that open on pulsing masts
 and stunted grass, the sighing sails
that wring most of the Hoodoo
from my hands
 and leave the bitter bone.

We had trust and a future
 that opened like a hatbox
 and sounded like a bass drum,
took our time at New Year's brunch
at the brightest hotel in Spokane.
Half the people
 in Tabbi's hometown,
 so far from anywhere else,
knew I was turning 35
before I heard their names.
 Her hair grew back
wild from the chemo, the color
of bourbon and smoke.
 Her arms, silky
in their ebony opera gloves,
 held and pulled me like a tide
 before her nails opened gashes
that stranded us on an unfamiliar shore.

Poem with the Ahem Chopped off (2017)

Progress is minimal. The dance
under the lamp continues
while others slumber

and I am still trying to think of something to praise,
sliding down the hillside
at the end of summer
searching for a short sleep.